

BILLY WHISKERS

By FRANCES MONTGOMERY

The chums were disturbed by a noise just as they started to eat their supper.

"Clumpety, clump, clumpety, clump, down the stairs came a stupid-looking servant, girl with a plate of fried chicken in one hand and a dish of lovely crisp lettuce in the other. These she put on the shelf and then turned and stumped her way up the stairs again. Then they heard her locking up for the night, as they thought, but soon she appeared wearing her hat and went out the side door through which they had come into the cellar. They all kept very still for a little while, then Button meowed to Stubby to tell him what he could see on the shelf for them to eat, and where Billy could find some potatoes and other vegetables. Stubby crawled out from under the tubs and ran to where Button said the shelf was, but alas and alack! how was he to get at the things on the shelf? It was six feet above him and so hung from the ceiling that there was absolutely no way for him to climb up to it.

"Gez whiz! It makes me hungrier than ever to smell all those goodies and not be able to get at them!"

While Stubby was standing there trying to think out a way to reach them, Button cautiously climbed down from the boxes onto the shelf and with his nose and paw poked a big round potato and a thick slice of meat off the plate to the floor. As they fell they hit Stubby on the nose and made him jump, it was so unexpected, and at first he thought some one was throwing things at him. While he ate the meat Button helped himself to fried chicken and Billy came over and heaved in him not to be so greedy but to throw him down some lettuce.

"Why don't you go over into that corner and eat those carrots and other vegetables?" meowed Button.

"Because I am not such a goose as to eat cold, dirty potatoes and cow's food when I can get my favorite nice crisp lettuce."

The three ate and ate, for they were very hungry after their long tramp on the road all day. After Button had pushed all the food onto the floor he did not want for himself, and had licked his plate.

He said: "How I wish I had a nice drink of milk now to quench my thirst. If I had that, I could go to sleep and sleep until daylight without waking, even if a rat chewed my tail and a mouse bit my ear."

"A pail of clean, cool water would please me better," said Billy.

They Go Upstairs

"Me too," said Stubby. "Listen! I hear water running somewhere," he added.

"It sounds to me as if it were in the kitchen upstairs," said Billy. "I don't hear any one stirring around up there, so let us go and get a drink and then turn in for the night."

Billy walked to the cellar steps and was half way up, with Stubby and Button just behind him, when they heard some one exclaim: "Chester, come quick! Come quick! The water is running in the sink, and the cellar is flooded."

This was followed by the loud laughter of two people.

"Whatever shall we do?" said a girl's distressing voice.

"Get a mop and mop it up!" replied a boy.

"But the mop is in the cellar, and I'll get my feet wet if I cross the floor to go to the cellar. Besides, I have on my best white shoes."

Coffee Pot in Sink

"Where do you keep the broom?" That will do."

"Behind the kitchen door, usually, but with the house all torn up with housecleaning I don't know where it is."

"I'll find it. You stay out of the room so you won't get wet."

"Who ever would have thought that just because I happened to set that coffee pot over the hole in the sink it would make it overflow?"

"No one would," answered the boy. "And here is all this mess just because we hadn't any sense and tried to eat a bottle of ginger ale by setting it in the coffee pot and letting the water run on it."

The three listeners on the stairs heard him get the broom from behind the kitchen door.

"Where are you going to sweep the water?" asked the girl.

"Down the cellar stairs! It won't hurt anything down there."

And before Billy, Stubby or Button could move, a deluge of water

struck them full in the face, blinding them and sousing them from the tips of their noses to the ends of their tails.

Billy Gets Mad

This made Button sneeze, and he climbed back to the top of the boxes. Billy turned on the stairs, but before he could really face about another sweep of the broom sent a second deluge on him, and, blinded by water and mad with rage, he rushed up the stairs to escape it. Instead of getting out of the way, he ran straight into the boy who was sweeping, which surprised the boy so that he let go the broom handle and it, too, flew out of his hands and hit Billy on the head. This made Billy so angry that he jumped for the boy and butted him straight into the sink, where he sat down in the overflowing basin. The girl, too, panic-stricken to move, stood in the doorway wringing her hands and crying: "Don't butt me, Mr. Billy! Goat! I didn't do a thing!"

They Go to Sleep

Now Billy Whiskers is a gentleman and he didn't butt the girl, which made the girl so happy that she led the three chums out into the yard and into the barn, where there was a nice pile of hay. Before they went to sleep in the hay she gave them three fine big dishes of nice cool water, which they drank and lay down, all three falling off to sleep immediately.

They were awakened at day-break the next morning by a battered tin crashing against the wall of the barn, followed by a shower of pieces of red paper. All three jumped up and were wide awake in a second, for all around them was the din of battle. For a moment they thought they were back in France and that a big bombardment was on. But on looking through a crack in the side of the barn in which they had been sleeping, they saw a crowd of boys shooting off firecrackers and putting bunches of them under barrels and tin pans.

Fourth of July

"This is no place for us!" exclaimed Billy. "I despise the Fourth of July and its celebration, and this is just what it is. If those boys see us it will be all up with us, for there is one thing boys love it is to torture animals on the Fourth by tying bunches of firecrackers and tin cans on their tails."

"Well, thank goodness, my tail is so short they will have a good time tying anything on it," exclaimed Stubby.

"Mine, too," replied Billy. "But how about mine?" said Button. "It is long enough to tie a whole string of crackers to it."

While they were talking the boys started to run in their direction and came straight toward them. When they were within hearing distance the chums heard them say: "Let's pretend the barn is a fort. We'll put a lot of powder around it and blow it up."

"What did I tell you?" said Billy. "There is no safe place for men or beasts on the Fourth of July if there is a boy within a hundred miles."

"Prepared to Fight

"What shall we do?" asked Stubby. "If we stay here we will be blown up or maimed for life. And if we run out the whole pack will probably set upon us."

"I say we show fight, anyway," said Button. "In the first place, they don't know we are here; and in the second, we have the advantage of taking them by surprise. Billy, you can butt them, while Stubby bites their heels, and I will run up their backs and scratch the shirts off their shoulders."

"Good idea, Button!" commended Billy. "You should have been a General, at least, in the army."

"Oh, stop your fooling and mind when I hiss we all jump out of the barn at once and attack our victims. Select the boy you will attack as they come toward us."

"All right," replied Billy. "I'll attack that big red-headed boy who seems to be the leader."

"Then I'll go for that boy who runs with his head and shoulders down. It gives me a good expanse of back to scratch," said Button.

Boys Rush Them

On came the boys, whooping and hallooing with all the power of their lungs. But when they were within twenty feet of the barn that concealed the chums, they jumped out at them. The leader stopped in his tracks, too dazed and surprised to move, at seeing a strange goat come flying out of the barn straight toward him with horns lowered to butt. He scarcely had time to know he was surprised when he was hit in the pit of the stomach and sent sprawling in the sand fifteen feet away. As he picked himself up he saw a funny sight—a big boy running straight for the lake with a big black cat sitting on his shoulders scratching the shirt off his back. Button never moved, but stuck to him as the boy swam farther and farther out. At last it seemed to occur to the boy to dismount, which he did; and Button, hating the water as all cats do, jumped for a big rock that was sticking out of the lake. There he sat and meowed for Billy to swim out and carry him to shore on his back, as he had often done before. But Billy was nowhere in sight. After butting the boy he had disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed him.

Chases Them

As for Stubby, he had chased

all the boys up town, first biting one boy's shins and then attacking another until he had driven them howling two or three blocks from where they started. When he saw he had gotten the boys so far away he stopped chasing them and went back to see what Billy and Button were doing. But when he reached the old spot neither Billy nor Button was anywhere in sight. All he could see was a black object on a rock sticking out of the water. It looked like some one's wet muff or old coat. He did not know that that same wet muff was his own beloved Button.

Button was meowing as loudly as he could for Stubby to swim out and rescue him, but the wind was in the wrong direction to carry his voice to Stubby. Stubby looked around and even set up a howl, trying to find out where

Billy and Button had gone, but no answering call came back. He sniffed around but could get no scent of them. Then all of a sudden he saw a boy come out of the lake and run up the shore. He started after him on a dead run, thinking that perhaps he would lead him to some boys who might have captured Billy. He was running with his head down when all of a sudden he pitched headlong into a dry well. What was his surprise on opening his eyes after the shock to find himself staring into Billy Whiskers' eyes! "How in green gooseberries did you get here?" he asked.

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